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General Debate 3 (a): Actions for the further implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development at the global, regional and national levels

3 (b): Sustainable cities, human mobility and international migration

Statement submitted by International Young Professionals Foundation, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council[2] and The Organization for Poverty Alleviation and Development

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[1] E/CN.9/2018/1.
[2] The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Statement

Disasters, wars, globalisation and international trade have increased mobility of people across the globe. Building sustainable cities with and for immigrants paves the way to achieving sustainable development for all humankind.

Urban sustainability must take into consideration and overcome the contemporary challenges about concentration of economic activity, innovation and job creation, the potential for social transformation, high levels of concentration of culture, people, infrastructure and buildings. Cities are not omnipotent when it comes to reducing or mitigating the side effects of those phenomena; governments have to play a leading role in creating and overseeing the infrastructure for multi-sector approach to urban sustainability.

Sustainable cities are often widely referred to as "cities of the rich" but this should not be the case. A place for people with various job experiences and professional qualifications is available. To that extent, the diverse background of immigrants could be an important economic stimulus. Nevertheless, there are a wide range of governmental and legal barriers, lengthy procedures, and lack of other financial incentives that discourage immigrants from engaging in economic activity. As employees, as well as job providers, immigrants could contribute to overcoming poverty in cities, reducing social disparities and increasing overall welfare. Avoiding discrimination in hiring, for example, by preferring a permanent resident or a citizen over an equally qualified job candidate with an immigrant profile, or creating facilities for entrepreneurship (incubating or accelerating start-ups, co-working places, venture capital) might benefit cities. Other entities in the urban environment can also guard against problems. The industry, NGOs, universities and academics are among key stakeholders in delivering urban sustainability infrastructure.

The cultural perspectives of immigrants should also be explored for the benefit of a sustainable city. Even though immigrants come from all over the world, their being "different" from the native-born population often places them at the margin of the society, or even worse, encapsulates them in a ghetto where they are surrounded by other immigrants, often of the same place or region of origin. Breaking these borders could be facilitated by governments. Local city authorities in cooperation with governments could encourage and support more cultural events that are inclusive of immigrants and enable them to demonstrate their culture. Examples include festivals, gatherings over a meal, art exhibitions, music and dance performances, workshops to make artefacts, even just storytelling in front of people from the neighbourhood. This is not a costly effort; moreover, cultural activities are consolidating the whole community. When the immigrants demonstrate their peaceful and interesting culture in an immersive, highly engaging way, there is a lasting sense of intriguing openness that is a key enabler in community-immigrants' relations ever after.

Urban sustainability will benefit from immigrants and the diversity of stakeholders in the community. Once all facilities in a city are established in coordination with the government — but not funded with public funds solely — the cross-proliferation of ideas will be delivered. Start-up visas given to entrepreneurial immigrants can be complemented with business development and research spaces that enable the establishment of cooperatives and social enterprises in the city. These more democratic forms of business represent a substantial potential for urban transformation and need to be incentivized. For instance, easier procedures for starting a business should be promoted. The sharing of technology, knowledge and finance should be fostered by governments as well as supporting measures for engaging immigrants in collaborative business through a multi-actor approach in urban sustainability.